

landscapes

The Deschutes Land Trust works cooperatively with landowners to conserve land for wildlife, scenic views, and local communities.

THE NEWSLETTER OF DESCHUTES LAND TRUST { VOL 16, SPRING 2012 }

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ASSESSMENT + OPINIONS

HELP US CHART THE FUTURE

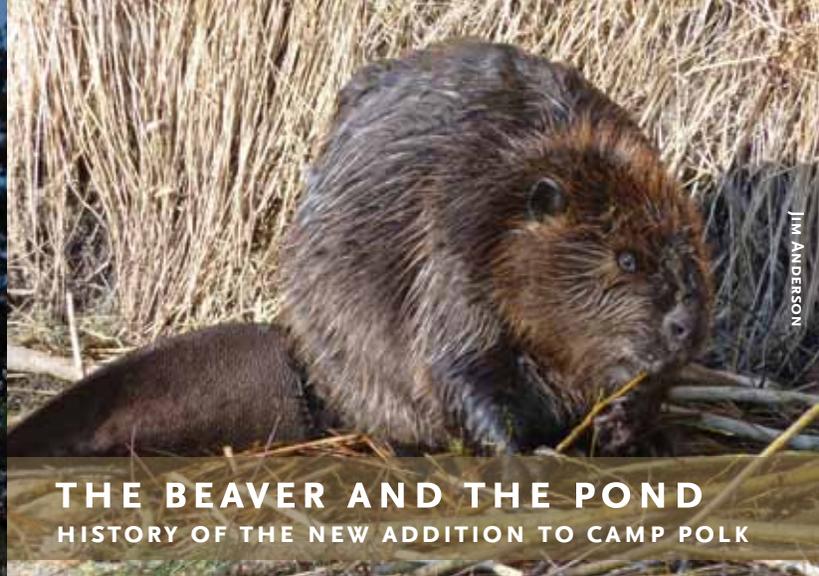
The Deschutes Land Trust is at a pivotal point in our 16 year history. This spring, two concurrent opinion gathering processes will shape and guide the next chapter of the Land Trust's work in Central Oregon and beyond.

First, noted Oregon philanthropist John Gray has begun a process called the "Oregon Land Trust Grant Program and Advancement Initiative."

The goal of this initiative is to further the pace and effectiveness of private land conservation in Oregon. Gray, best known in the region for his role in the development of the Sunriver community, has partnered with the Land Trust Alliance and the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts to create a multi-phase assessment process, which will be followed by an unprecedented financial commitment to private land conservation in our state. The initiative is a wonderful opportunity for the Land Trust to pause and assess how we're meeting the conservation needs of our region, and to engage our many partners in the conversation.

Second, the Land Trust is conducting its own assessment of how we're meeting our community's conservation needs. To participate more, visit www.deschuteslandtrust.org/survey to answer a brief survey related to land conservation, access to our Preserves, and what you'd like to see from us in the coming years. It will be the first survey we've undertaken since 2006, so we are looking forward to seeing what you have to say.

We're anxious to share both the results of the Gray/Land Trust Alliance assessment and our membership survey later this year. Stay tuned! ➤



JIM ANDERSON

THE BEAVER AND THE POND HISTORY OF THE NEW ADDITION TO CAMP POLK

Elmer Pond has always had a love-hate relationship with the beaver. The Pond family once owned much of what is now Camp Polk Meadow Preserve, and Elmer spent several high school summers there before buying his own piece of the meadow in 1968. During that time, beavers always played a central role at the property—sometimes good and sometimes bad.

In winter, beavers made it possible to ice skate at Camp Polk Meadow. "[You] used to be able to skate right down [the] meadow. You had to be pretty good because it was rough, but you could skate the beaver ditches. We called them skating trails," said Elmer. When the beaver weren't contributing to winter recreation, they kept Elmer on his toes trying to manage the ponds and flooding created by their dams.

Others were also troubled by the beavers. In the early 1990s, Elmer recalls, the last 20 or so beaver were removed from his portion of the meadow. Today beavers are enjoying a resurgence as we begin to understand and recognize the benefits they provide to natural systems. In fact, their ponds improve water quality and quantity, they add wood to creeks and create side channels, and they improve streamside vegetation and reduce erosion. All these services in turn contribute to better wildlife and fish habitat.

The Land Trust has active beaver populations at Whychus Canyon Preserve and in the lower meadow at Camp Polk Meadow Preserve. Given that the Pond property was such an active beaver site, there is no doubt the beavers will one day return to this new part of Camp Polk Meadow Preserve. Our hope is that our restoration of Whychus Creek and the wetlands at the Pond Addition will only serve to speed up the process. As movie character Ray Kinsella says, "If you build it, they will come." ➤

Thanks to Elmer for sharing his stories of Camp Polk Meadow in a 2011 interview. For tours of the new Pond Addition to Camp Polk Meadow Preserve visit: www.deschuteslandtrust.org.

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RESTORING CAMP POLK MEADOW

It's a cold day in February and the Land Trust's Camp Polk Meadow Preserve is humming with activity. Biologists, bulldozers, and volunteers with buckets, comb the meadow working on the final phase of the Whychus Creek restoration.

The last time the meadow saw this level of activity was 2009, when the restoration kicked off and bulldozers began the work of returning Whychus Creek to its historic route through the meadow. Fast forward three years, the excavation of the restored channel and its floodplain is complete. So is the re-planting of the channel, where volunteers and crews planted more than 180,000 sedges, willows and dogwoods. Electric fencing and temporary irrigation went up for two years to help those plants grow and came down last fall once they were established.

FORTY-SEVEN YEARS IN THE MAKING

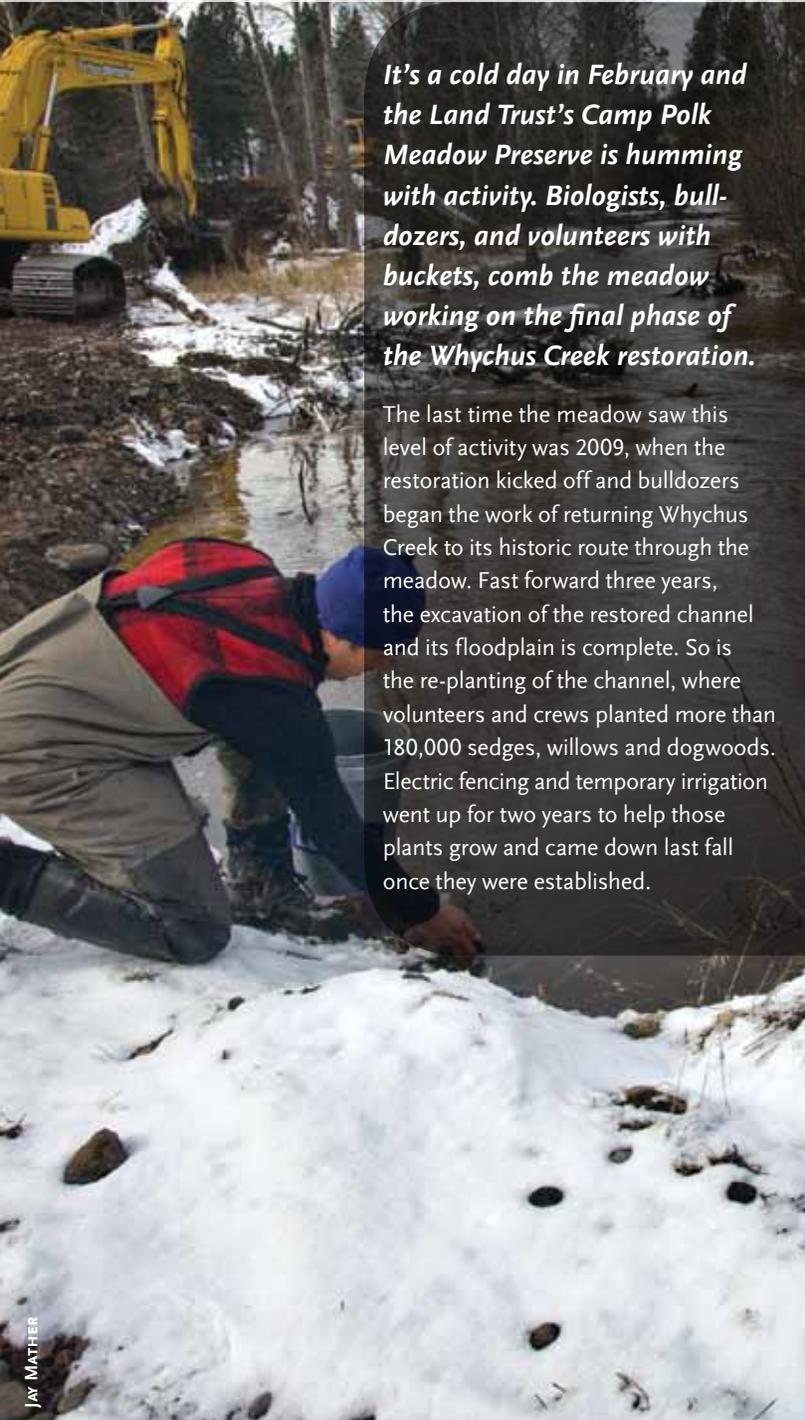
Crews also returned to the meadow last fall to remove temporary channel plugs and access roads and to carve side channels throughout the meadow. These mini creeks will be important overflow channels for high water times and will also provide rearing habitat for juvenile fish. What's more, these side channels have really begun to change the face of the meadow, bringing more water and wildlife habitat to a once dry and dusty place.

In February, the rubber hit the road...or the dirt hit the water! Bulldozers gathered at the intersection of the old and restored channel and dumped 10,000 cubic yards of rock, dirt, and more than 80 trees into Whychus Creek. The flow of Whychus Creek was redirected into our restored channel!

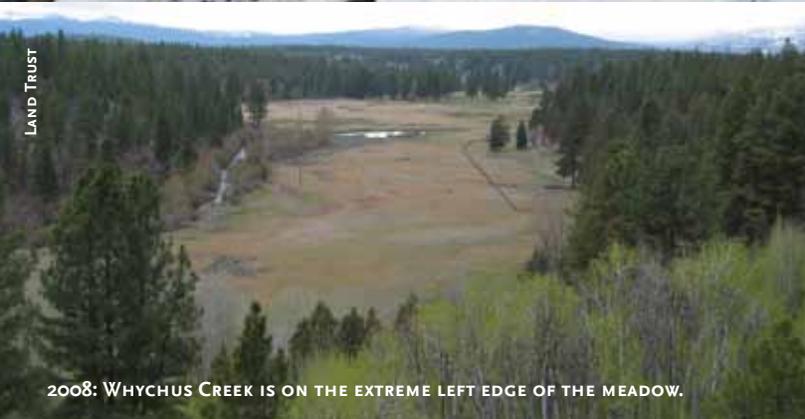
Cue the biologists and volunteers with buckets. Their job was to rescue any stranded fish left in the blocked channel and move them to their new home in the restored channel. Biologists located these stranded fish by delivering an electric current to the water. Then, while the fish were still stunned, volunteers gathered them in buckets and delivered them to the new Whychus Creek. And then they did it again—for two days! "It's incredible to see Whychus Creek finally return to Camp Polk Meadow. The Land Trust has been working toward this for nearly 15 years—I can't tell you how pleased we are," said Brad Chalfant, the Land Trust's executive director.

Now what? In some ways the work is really just beginning. Another round of plantings will take place this spring, and then the Land Trust will monitor the restoration and see how it responds over time. We're eager to see what happens as our once dry meadow continues to be transformed. Most of all, the Land Trust will continue to take care of the meadow ensuring that it is protected and remains great habitat for fish and wildlife. ➤

While the restoration area is closed to the public, you can always join the Land Trust for special restoration tours this spring and summer! For more details on restoration tours, videos, and slideshows, visit: www.deschuteslandtrust.org.



JAY MATHER



2008: WHYCHUS CREEK IS ON THE EXTREME LEFT EDGE OF THE MEADOW.



2012: WHYCHUS CREEK NOW MEANDERS THROUGH THE MEADOW.

CARY MILLER

SKYLINE FOREST

IT AIN'T OVER 'TIL IT'S OVER

As the great Yogi Berra said, "it's déjà vu all over again." Or was it, "it ain't over 'til it's over?" Though Yogi wasn't talking about Skyline Forest, his quotations ring true because the quest to conserve this land has certainly undergone many twists and turns. The good news is the Land Trust remains committed to conserving Skyline Forest as a publicly accessible, working community forest of protected green foothills below the snowcapped Three Sisters.

Typically the Land Trust doesn't announce new projects until we have them under contract. The reason for that is pretty simple: watching a project move from idea to reality can feel like watching paint dry. However, back in 2005, the Land Trust needed to announce our intention to acquire Skyline Forest because we had to show the corporate owners that there was strong public support for protecting our backyard. It was a calculated gamble, and it got their attention, but it also initiated a multiyear odyssey that has challenged the public's collective attention span.

So where do we stand on Skyline now? This past fall and winter, the Land Trust worked with the owner of Skyline to analyze the commercial value of the forest. We've also thought long and hard about what the Land Trust and our community can afford to permanently protect Skyline for our children and grandchildren. While this behind-the-scenes work is an important step in the ongoing negotiations to secure Skyline Forest, it's clear we still have a great deal of work ahead of us.

Maintaining the public's interest and attention for a decade-long project can be tough for an organization that depends upon the annual generosity of the community to do our work. Fortunately, many of you have stood with us, recognizing how important Skyline Forest is to the future of Central Oregon. With your support we've been able to maintain our focus and continue to march forward. While we continue our pursuit of this complex transaction, we invite you to take a walk or hike in in the forest. Get to know its trails, forests, and buttes, and help us spread the word about why it's so important to our future. ➤



LISA BAGWELL

CITIZEN SCIENCE

THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

Visit Camp Polk Meadow any day of the year and you'll see someone studying the sky or bushes with binoculars. Often this will just be a visitor who knows that Camp Polk is a birding hot spot. But more likely it will be a Land Trust volunteer surveying birds as part of a larger monitoring program.

Call it citizen science or just volunteer data collection, Land Trust bird surveyors play a critical role monitoring the health and well-being of a place. Bird surveys began in 2000 (shortly after the Land Trust acquired Camp Polk Meadow) when a group of volunteers approached the Land Trust about regular bird monitoring. There was enough interest in the project that some of the same volunteers even decided to start a new local birding organization: East Cascades Bird Conservancy, now East Cascades Audubon Society.

In the early years, volunteers quickly documented 135 bird species representing nearly 40 avian families. Volunteers also documented breeding behaviors for 100+ bird species, an excellent indicator of the diversity of birds drawn to the property. In fact, the concentration of breeding birds at Camp Polk Meadow far exceeded surveyors' expectations. By 2005, volunteers had documented a number of regionally rare breeding-season birds such as Peregrine Falcon, Long-billed Curlew, Eastern Kingbird, Gray Catbird, and Golden-crowned Sparrow.

Ten years later the bird survey program is still contributing valuable data to the cause. The species list is up to 150 with recent additions of Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Prairie Falcon, Eurasian Collared Dove, Green-tailed Towhee, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Black Phoebe. Now managed by volunteer Eva Eagle, the program relies on a hardy crew of volunteers to visit Camp Polk and document what they see. "The beauty of this volunteer job is you get to do what you love (birding) and you can do it as much or little as you like. As long as you document your time, it all contributes to the greater good," said Eva.

What is the greater good? Survey data helped establish Camp Polk Meadow as a birding "hot spot." It helps the Land Trust monitor how avian species are doing at the Preserve over time. The data will also be critical to evaluating how birds respond to the major restoration of Whychus Creek at Camp Polk Meadow. But we need your help. We need more birders out there surveying! **Contact Eva Eagle at golden_eagle@mac.com or the Land Trust at 541-330-0017.**

Learn more about our partner in bird conservation, East Cascades Audubon Society, at: www.ecbcbirds.org.



JAY MATHER

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